

NARRATIVE OF A TRIP TO THE FALLS OF SHEWINAGAM.

It was on a May morning in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty, and something more, that four resolute and adventurous characters started from Three Rivers, to view the falls on the River St. Maurice, which have been seen by few, though they are destined to become so celebrated. About the orthography of their name appellative writers are disagreed; I shall not therefore presume to settle that matter, but would merely admonish ignorant people, that, when they read of the falls of *Shewinagam*, *Shawinegum*, *Shawenegan*, that is to say, a word of four syllables, beginning with *Shaw* or *Shew*, and ending with *gun*, *gam*, *gum* or *gan*, one and the same cataract on the River St. Maurice, at about thirty miles distance from Three Rivers, is intended and signified; nor must they conceive in their imagination any other cataract, should, at any time, the word *Cha-ou-in-i-gan* appear in its quinti syllabic majesty, before their eyes. But to return to our four resolute and daring adventurers. The weather was as unpropitious as it well could be for our undertaking; however, as our canoe men had been sent forward the preceding day, to meet us at the falls called the Grès, start we must in spite of the pouring rain. We set off accordingly in a couple of vehicles, between four and five o'clock, and arrived safe and well at the portage of the Grès about ten, though somewhat fatigued, by reason that the branches of the trees overhanging the road had necessitated us to "aye keep bowing," as Sir Pertinax says, in order to retain corporal possession of our hats and wigs. Here we sheltered ourselves in a log cabin, and after refreshing ourselves with a few of the good things we had brought with us, passed half an hour in anxiety, waiting for our voyageurs, whom we at last espied pulling the canoe along against the rapid current, by means of the branches that overhung the water. It was past eleven when we embarked in the canoe; we passed Isle Tourte, about a league in length, apparently of a fine alluvial soil. About two o'clock we came in sight of Shewinagam; we saw at about the distance of a mile from us, the head of the falls through the tops of the highest trees.* Intending to reserve our complete view of the fall until our return on the following day, we went ashore, and having propped up our canoe on one side, spread a blanket or two by way of a canopy, kindled a fire, boiled our kettle and cooked our potatoes, we despatched our dinner in voyageur style, with a hearty appetite, good humour, and spirits fifty per cent above par. Then we ascended the portage road, and had a view of the pretty little fall which I shall call Shewiniga, and shall describe hereafter. About half past three, P. M., we were again on the water, and found the river to time into beautiful and spacious bays, in one of which we descried a canoe of lumbermen, who, after having seen and heard no human being but ourselves for several hours in this solitude of nature, occasioned a sensation quite as agreeable, I think, as when being at sea, after having the ocean to ourselves for several days, we at length descried a distant sail. We reached the Portage Les Hêtres, or Beech Portage, (so called from the number of beech trees which grow there,) about six, P. M. Here finding a snug shanty or log cabin, we resolved to pass the night, as we learned we could not reach the Grande Mère before dark, and where also there was no shelter. A large rock stood facing the open end of our cabin, against which we kindled a noble fire; candles we had forgot to bring with us, (the only thing we had overlooked,) but the want of them was in some degree supplied by our men, who kindled rolls of birch bark, set upright in the earth with a stick. Having hung our wet cloaks to dry, we enjoyed our supper and retired to rest. Nothing of importance occurred during the night, except that one of the party had his slumbers suddenly interrupted by the uncomfortable sensation that his toes were being burnt, and after rubbing his eyes, he discovered that a spark had caught his coverlet, and was eating it away like tinder. Next morning after breakfast, we proceeded along the Portage road to La Rigole des Hêtres, a beautiful little rapid, which shall in future again be sketched by many a painter.

"Fair laughed the morn, and soft the zephyrs blew,"

and the sun shining in his strength gave promise of a more agreeable day than the last; when once more embarked, in high spirits, we pursued our upward course, every now and then enlivened by the song of the voyageurs, the cheerfulness of which was heightened by contrast with the solitude of the scene—

Il y a long temps m'amie, je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.

* From this circumstance, as well as from the hill of Shewinagam, (nearly at the top of which the fall commences,) being visible from the Grès, at eight miles distance, and also from having actually climbed the hill, I should judge the entire descent from the top of the fall to the basin below, to be full two hundred feet.

The end of each stave was announced by the youngest of our guides setting up a peculiar cry like the crowing of a cock, that had in it much more drollery than music.

Notwithstanding the numerous rapids, there was less difficulty in ascending the stream than I had anticipated; for where there was a current running down the mid channel of the river at the rate of five or six miles an hour, we sometimes found an eddy running up for a considerable distance at the rate of three or four; this we availed ourselves of as long as it lasted, and then shooting rapidly across the main stream, we often found ourselves in another eddy. At half past nine we reached La Grande Mère, or the Grand Mother; so called from a rock which stands in the midst of one of the falls. Another rock named Le Bon Homme, the Good Fellow, stands below. There are three falls unconnected with each other, which meet in a large basin. They are striking and picturesque, but not so terrific as Shewinagam—there is no awful chasm, nor is the altitude of the fall so great. We remained here till after eleven, and after drinking a glass of madeira to the health of our Grand Mother and the Good Fellow we commenced our return.—Before leaving Les Hêtres we were warned of the approach of a heavy shower, which soon came on in torrents, making the surface of the water as it were to boil, and teaching us the value of our boat cloaks. We reached Shewinagam, a distance of three leagues, in two hours, including a portage of half a mile.—Though it still continued to rain, we made use of our time, while the men were preparing dinner, to view the falls. Of these there are three in time of high water, which having learned a little latin when I was a boy, I shall denominate Shewinagus, Shewinaga and Shewinagum.* Of these Shewinagus and Shewinagum, though distinct falls, meet in the chasm before they are discharged into the bay below. Shewinagum is the most easterly, or towards the left bank of the river. Shewinagus is the middlemost, and Shewinaga, (I make her the lady from her superior elegance,) is to be seen only in time of flood; therefore as Sir Walter Scott says,

"If you would see fair Melrose aright,
Go visit her by the pale moon-light."

So do I say—

"If you would see fair Shewinaga,
Go visit her in the month of May."

On ascending the portage-path, we descended through the trees, which at the time of our visit were not in full leaf, fair Shewinaga, dancing down the slope of the hill on our right hand with sinuous courses; about mid-way she grows suddenly fretful, and tosses herself headlong down a precipice of thirty feet; then skipping along as before, glides gently at last with the main body of the river. So doth a damsel of gentle blood, go forth from her chamber on a sun-bright morning, redolent of joy and youth, and conscious of her charms; lightly and delicately she trips along, gaily she descends the winding staircase of some lordly mansion, till encountering her waiting maid in her progress, she charges her with some error or neglect for which she scolds her well, but soon resuming her placid temper and sweet countenance, with becoming composure she glides into the salle a déjeuner—

"The cynosure of wondering eyes
In beauty waits, as the light
Of cloudless climes and starry skies."

So much for the beauty and elegance of Shewinaga. But what pen shall describe the terrific contrast—the conflict, the collision, the co-thunder of the waters of Shewinagus, and of Shewinagum? I ascended the hill with the chasm on my right hand till I came to a point which I shall call the point of co-thunder. There, looking up, I saw Shewinagum pouring his mighty flood down an inclined plane swift as an arrow, and Shewinagus tumbling and bounding from rock to rock to meet him, and when they met in the chasm below, what a sublime and terrific scene! what rattling, roaring, tossing, boiling and foaming of waters!

"When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war!"

It was indeed an angry "meeting of the waters," and far from "a mingling in peace." There are large fissures in the precipitous rock into which the waves are driven by the force of the collision, as I have seen on the sea coast during a storm. Immediately above the fall the current is unbroken and quiet, though very rapid, as might be observed on seeing a huge log suddenly dip one end and then wholly disappear, on approaching the edge of the precipice. Arrived at the top, I followed the course of Shewinaga till I came to a rude bridge, consisting of a single log which we had thrown across at its outlet. In spite of our contrivance, however, two of our party being, as I suppose, naturally awkward, managed to tumble into the water while kindly proffering to aid each other.

Returning to our encampment thoroughly soaked, for every sapling we laid hold of to aid us in ascending, proved literally a shower bath, we took a hasty meal, and started for the Grès at four, which in an hour we reached. The portage is long, and took up an hour and a half. The falls of the Grès are worth seeing, though we did not approach them very near. On nearing the Falls Gabelle we got into a smooth unbroken current of prodigious velocity—the effect of the motion was quite exciting—our canoe glided down it with the swiftness of a steamboat and the dignity of a swan. The pleasing

* I must beg all future explorers and tourists to observe this nomenclature of mine.

appearance of this spot, like that of thousands of others in America, has been much injured by its being denuded of the fine trees that once graced it, an injury that an age cannot repair. When will the march of intellect provide us with intellectual lumbermen, who shall possess taste and sentiment enough to forbear cutting down the majestic pines which grace interesting spots among the islands, rocks and banks of rivers.

It was about eight o'clock when we passed the Forges of St. Maurice. The weather had cleared up soon after we had left Shewinagam; a lovely evening succeeded, and as we approached the St. Lawrence, our boatmen again struck up one of their peculiar songs, and so placid was the scene, the moon walking in brightness above, and the still silver waters below,—

“No breath of air to break the wave,”

that it appeared strange to think that the “peaceful river soft and slow,” that bore our canoe on its bosom, was the same that we had seen a few hours ago struggling, tossing, and dashed into foam as it forced its way through the chasm of Shewinagam.

I need hardly say that we returned home highly delighted with our excursion to a cataract which probably is next to Niagara the most remarkable in America: and is one of the few that is not yet desecrated and disfigured by unsightly buildings, fragments of sawed timber, and other hideous objects. Here nature still reigns in wild and lonely magnificence, and there are no voices of the “profanum vulgus,” no clamors of vulgar admiration to break in upon the recondite reflections of the pensive and studious. Haste then before the vulgarity of saw-mills shall metamorphose and mar the scene: haste, ye painters, poets and poetesses, sentimentalists, and all who are content to have slumbers sweet and soft under tent or tarpaulin, in search of the sublime, or to be romantically wet to the skin in enjoyment of the beautiful.

Let it be observed that though the Falls of Shewinagam must be very interesting at any season, the above description of them will be found literally correct only during the high waters of the spring and fall; let no one therefore, who has seen them, or who may see them, during their low summer state, presume to call in question the fidelity of this narrative. We should recommend the excursion to be taken between the 20th and the end of May, or between the 25th September and the 15th October.

In conclusion, as in duty bound, I have only to mention with honor the names of our canoe men Antoine La Traye, Louis his brother, Joseph Grenier and Ambrose Boulard, of Cape Magdelaine, who well deserve the credit of being recorded as steady, skilful, laborious, and civil and obliging withal; and I take this opportunity of recommending their services, if they are alive and well, to future adventurers. It is strange that there has been no regular mode yet set on foot by which strangers might be enabled to make the excursion without difficulty or delay. Surely it might be worth while for some person in Three Rivers to keep two or three canoes in readiness for such occasions, and doubtless as soon as a good road is completed, a house of entertainment not far from the spot would be not a bad speculation; an establishment of that kind at the Falls of Trenton, New York, receives crowds of visitors every summer, and these Falls are not to be named with those of Shewinagam. However, as there is no tolerable place of refreshment at the Chaudiere Falls which are so near Quebec, the capital of the Province, it will probably be many years before the pilgrim to Shewinagam will have it in his power to say like Falstaff, “I will take mine ease at mine inn.”